

The Vowels of English

English vowels are learned by listening and imitating. Vowels are made(produced) by voiced air passing through different mouth shapes; the differences in the shape of the mouth are caused by different positions of the tongue and of the lips. There are 20 vowel sounds in English(12 vowels, 8 diphthongs) . English vowels can be divided into two types: short vowels(simple vowels) , they are seven in number. Long vowels are six in number.

-Why a detailed description of the tongue position for a certain vowel does not really help us to pronounce it well?

-Because it is easy to see and to feel the lip differences , but it is very difficult to see or feel the tongue differences.

Simple Vowels

They include the following :

/ɪ/, /e/, / ə/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ʊ/, /ʌ/

Long Vowels include the following :

/i:/, / ɜ:/, /ɔ:/, / u:/, / ɑ: /

The following table shows the short and the long vowels .

| Short(simple) | long |
|---------------|---------------|
| <i>/ɪ/</i> | <i>/i:/</i> |
| <i>/ ə/</i> | <i>/ ɜ:/</i> |
| <i>/ʊ/</i> | <i>/ɔ:/</i> |
| <i>/ʊ/</i> | <i>/ u:/</i> |
| <i>/æ/</i> | <i>/ ɑ: /</i> |
| <i>/e/</i> | ----- |
| <i>/ʌ/</i> | ----- |

-When the vowels are followed by a strong consonant , they are shorter than when they are followed by a weak consonant .

The following table shows the differences between /ɪ/ and /i:/

| /ɪ/ | /i:/ |
|---|--|
| Lid-wit-bin-chick-fill-rich-bid-lick-hill-tin-knit-list-rim-bit | /lead-wheat-been-cheek-feel-reach-head-leak-heel-teen-neat-least-ream-beat |

The following table shows the differences between /æ/and /ɑ: /

| /æ/ | /ɑ: / |
|---|--|
| Tan-bat-pan-sacks-Dad-mash-bad-lack-Hal-gnat-ram- | Lark-card-dark-last-bark-carp-pass-parched-barn-farm-larks |

The following table shows the differences between /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/

| /ɒ/ | /ɔ:/ |
|--|------------------------|
| Lock-cod-dock-lost-box-cop-shod-wad-Poll | Shored-cord-ward-Paul- |

The following table shows the differences between /ʊ/ and / u:/

| /ʊ/ | / u:/ |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Should-could-would-look-pull | Shoed-cooed-wooded-Luke-pool |

The following table shows the differences between // ə/ and / ɜ: /

| / ə/ | / ɜ: / |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Banana-again-contain-perhaps-entertain-amateur- courageous-obey-allow-amount-adore-annoy-approve-attend-obstruct-achieve- | Purse-heard-perched-permanent-adjourn |

| | |
|---|--|
| account-aside-agree-appear-offence- adjourn- see page 84 | |
|---|--|

- The vowel / ə/ is the commonest of the English .It is a short and indistinct when it is not final. In final position, that is before a pause , the vowel/ ə/ more like /^/.
- **There are two main difficulties** with this vowel: First, to identify it and second , to get the right quality. In the first case, do not be deceived by English spelling ; there is no single letter which always stands for / ə/,**so rely on your ear.** Second, it is often useful to think of leaving out the vowel altogether where / ə/ **comes between consonants.** / ə/ **occurs in initial, medial, and in final position.**

The following table shows the differences between /e/ and /ʌ/

| /e/ | /ʌ/ |
|---|---|
| Led-wet-Ben-check-fell-wretch-ten- bet-pen-sex-dead-mesh-bed-hell-net- lest-bet | Ton-but-pun-sucks-dud-mush-bud- luck-hull-nut-lust-rum-cud-duk- bucks-cup |